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a fairly comfortable position with the intention of observing the bird's actions as carefully as possible. I could see his feet distinctly and his toes seemed to curl around and grasp the wire in the same way as those of a perching bird. He was standing almost erect and teetering a good deal in an effort to find his balance. Several times the pelican tried to stoop to a sitting posture but with very unsettling results. Once while trying to preen his breast feathers he almost fell over backward and had to flap his wings vigorously to get balanced again. Finally he became satisfied with the erect posture and remained in it for probably ten minutes. In the erect posture for a time his balancing movements were so nearly imperceptible at one hundred feet distance that I would not have been able to detect them if I had not had the advantage of a series of cross wires on a gate within about thirty feet of the bird. By use of these wires I was able to estimate that at best there was rhythmic movement of the head up and down through a distance of at least a half inch, varied every few seconds by a longer swing of two to three inches.

Just before this relatively stable period he had lifted first one foot and then the other several times as though the wire hurt his feet. Indeed, this performance reminded me very much of a barefoot boy trying to stand on a hot pavement. At the end of the quiet period the pelican began side-stepping and walked on the wire a distance of about four feet at the end of which he turned around facing in the opposite direction. In making the turn he got a good deal unbalanced and saved himself from falling by stepping onto the wooden rail with one foot. He again assumed the erect position and remained thus for some little time until excited by the screeching of a flock of gulls which flew near him. At 8:15 he flew away after having perched on the small wire for twenty-three minutes.

When first alighting he had been facing the pier and away from the water. The half turn made after the side-stepping performance brought him into a position facing the water. Before beginning the side-stepping he had made several efforts to stoop, with very strong appearance of getting ready to fly. Every effort to stoop destroyed his balance and he could not get a good jump into the air for starting flight. I do not think it possible that he could have gotten enough jump to enable him to clear the opposite rail. Whatever the actual reason for the half turn it certainly put him into position (facing the water) to launch easily into flight.

I have mentioned a failure to keep balance while attempting to preen. There were two or three fairly successful attempts but they were confined to very small adjustments of breast feathers with very brief action. At various times in the perching period the head was rotated from side to side but this did not involve much shifting in weight and was not very disturbing to balance.

The three cases which I have seen indicate that pelicans do have perching ambitions and that they can make a very creditable showing in a difficult situation. Do such performances indicate vestigial or initiatory tendencies in behavior?—W. E. ALLEN, *Scripps Institution for Biological Research of the University of California, La Jolla, September 20, 1922.*

## EDITORIAL NOTES AND NEWS

The editors of THE CONDOR are once more indebted to Mr. J. R. Pemberton for assistance. The annual index concluding our present volume was in large measure prepared by him.

Volume II, numbers 3-4 (in one), of Dawson's "Journal of the Museum of Comparative Oology" (Santa Barbara) reached our desk on October 31. A very important new nesting record for California is that, by Mr. W. L. Dawson, of the Yellow Rail in

Mono County. Mr. A. B. Howell contributes an article on "The Ethics of Collecting" which is fraught with sound sense; the principles set forth ought to be followed conscientiously by all collectors, and then there would be far less of criticism levied at the fraternity than is, unfortunately, now the case. The greater part of this issue of the "Journal" is occupied by accounts of nest-hunting, chiefly with the Sierra Nevada Rosy Finch as the objective, and with the human-interest element emphasized rather than the ornithological.

Volume III, number 3, of "The Murrelet", mimeographed "Official Bulletin of the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Club", reached us November 10. The editor, Mr. F. S. Hall of the Washington State Museum, Seattle, is to be congratulated upon the success of his efforts to produce a creditable journal with small resources. This issue contains several articles and notes on birds, valuable at least from a local standpoint, under the authorship of J. Hooper Bowles, S. F. Rathbun, Kenneth Racey, Walter F. Burton, C. de B. Green, E. A. Kitchin, and others.

The Chicago meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, held October 23 to 26, was well attended. More than forty papers were read. Elections included Dr. Arthur A. Allen to the class of Fellows, and D. R. Dickey, A. O. Gross, W. Huber, T. I. Storer and J. T. Zimmer to the class of Members.

Mr. M. P. Skinner, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming, is contemplating early publication of his book on the "Birds of the Yellowstone". Readers of *THE CONDOR* are already familiar with the type of literature produced by Mr. Skinner. He is an accurate observer and good writer, and his book, we predict, will constitute a worthy contribution to western ornithology.

Mr. Howard H. Cleaves, formerly with the San Diego Natural History Museum, is now located at Clarksburg, West Virginia, where he is serving as state secretary for the Wild Life League of West Virginia. The object of this society is to spread the conservation-of-game idea in a state where conservation is badly needed.

It is our conviction that the best piece of conservation legislation proposed for a long time is just now pending before Congress. This is Senate bill 1452 (H. R. 5823), which bill provides for the establishment of game refuges and properly regulated public shooting grounds. Its provisions would be carried out under the auspices of the United States Bureau of Biological Survey, and this would mean its administration upon a logical, scientific basis. We recommend that Cooper Club members support this bill by expressing their approval of it to their legislative representatives in Washington. The bill is likely to be brought up for final action early in the new session of Congress.

Mr. Edgar Chance, a British ornithologist, is the author of a late book entitled "The Cuckoo's Secret" (London, Sedgwick and Jackson), in which the egg-laying habits of the European Cuckoo are described and illustrated from photographs in great detail. A moot point has long been as to whether the bird lays its egg directly into the nest of the victim, or deposits its egg elsewhere and places said egg by the way of its beak into the foster nest. Mr. Chance is so sure of the correctness of his own conclusions, which are of the former import, that he has issued a "challenge" involving a wager of 500 pounds with anyone who wishes to set out to prove the contrary. Thus he hopes to stimulate further careful and scientific enquiry into "the cuckoo's secret". And at the same time the Englishman's love of sport will come into play!

Professor Lynds Jones, head of the Ecology department at Oberlin College, conducted a party of eleven students, via "Fords", from Ohio to California the past summer. The enterprising members of the party thus had the advantage of an ideally practical course in geographical distribution.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE SUBSPECIES

To the Editor of *The Condor*:

In these days when ornithological nomenclature and taxonomy seem to have become of more importance than the birds themselves, the primary or, indeed, the sole object of our system is not to be lost sight of. A scientific name, once it is bestowed, is after all only an assembly of two or three words so grouped as to convey an idea of the approximate perch height of the lucky or unlucky recipient in the genealogical tree; or, to put it differently, a statement of the evolutionary progress made by the particular group or individual in question, down to the year A. D. 1922, or whenever the baptism took place. Now, it seems to me that the fact that a certain horned lark's back, or a certain fox sparrow's bill is different from the backs or the bills of horned larks or fox sparrows occupying other areas is distinctly secondary to the fact that separate geographic situations have caused certain changes to take place. Unfortunately, our only way of expressing what has happened is in terms of millimeters or of color, or by some other equally unsatisfactory designation. These means of describing what changes have occurred